

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

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Prefatory Remarks

Permit me to make four prefatory remarks before presenting the paper itself. They are set forth in the interest of general orientation.

In the first place, I want it understood that I am fully committed to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, without equivocation or mental reservation of any kind. Whatever, therefore, is presented in this essay is said from that fixed point.

Secondly, this paper is intended to be a contribution to a discussion which has become necessary, especially since the San Francisco convention accepted two statements on Scripture that do not fully agree. The difference between them is due in part to the thirty years that separate them in terms of their composition. What is said in the Brief Statement, on the one hand, and what appears in the Statement on Scripture, on the other, can serve as the two poles of the conference studies that ought to follow under the requirements of Resolution Nine. Following through on this Resolution could be a most constructive development in the life of the church; for it would bring the pastoral conferences of Synod into the total process of developing our theology and keeping it abreast of each new problem.

In the third instance, I am here at the invitation of your program committee with the specific request that I make this particular contribution to your program: a study of the concepts of revelation and inspiration. This is not the kind of problem one drags into a Seminary class room. It is one that is intended for your mature judgment. I am here to render a service that is concerned with preserving nothing less than our Lutheran heritage.

Fourthly, the relationship between revelation and inspiration is not covered in our Missouri Synod literature, except for a sentence or two in the Statement on Scripture prepared by a joint committee of the Synodical Conference and adopted at San Francisco. Now, if I come down heavy on the Lutheran view of this connection -- well, this is because we call ourselves the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. I should want nothing so much as to have my church continue to be Lutheran.

With these preliminary observations out of the way, let us proceed to the subject proper. I have called it simply --

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

During the earlier decades of our century the shadow of Adolph von Harnack lay over the theological pursuits of Europe and America. Any one who wanted to be relevant to that age had to take account of this giant. He was a true liberal, one who had come to the conclusion that the essence of Christianity could be expressed in the two propositions that God is the Father of all men, and that all men are brothers. Obviously, genuine Lutheran theologians had to disagree with him. But they could not avoid reckoning with his influence in theology. Our own Dr. Francis Pieper took issue most vigorously with von Harnack in a volume bearing the same title as von Harnack's book; namely, "What Is Christianity?"

Now, Dr. C.F.W. Walther could not have written this book. The issues to which Dr. Pieper's book addressed itself had not yet been raised in Walther's day. The latter had other problems to wrestle with. We make this rather elementary observation here just because it is sometimes forgotten that theology moves, that the issues of one generation are not those of another. The corollary of this, of course, is that one does not answer the problems of 1959 except by formulations and discussions that are born of today and not of yesterday.

This is not the age of liberalism but what is known as neo-orthodoxy. X The theological Einstein of our day is not von Harnack but Karl Barth. X The latter is no liberal. In fact, he deserves the thanks of all of us for having led the churches of Europe and America back into a study of the Scriptures with all that this change in direction implies. What he has said and written moves like a glacier through the whole terrain of theological discussion and writing of our generation. No one who is interested in speaking and writing relevantly for our day can ignore this glacial movement. We ourselves can remain unaffected and indifferent only at the cost of theological sterility.

In turning the Church's attention to the Scriptures themselves, Karl Barth has eloquently discussed the concept of revelation. Part two of the first volume in his Dogmatik is devoted very largely to a discussion of "Das Geheimnis der Offenbarung." What he has written has been well done; and it would be sheer folly to try to ignore it. For one thing, it is well nigh impossible to understand a modern theological text without having some awareness of Barth's position. And theology, my friends, is our business -- not only as professors, but as pastors! For theology has to do with communicating and relating Biblical truth to a particular age and generation, that is to say, to our people of today.

We need to come to grips, therefore, with the notion of revelation, particularly as it relates to inspiration. In fact, I would venture the suggestion that this is the major task of our day. And so in this paper we propose to take up just this matter of revelation and inspiration. Our concern is not in this instance primarily academic, but pastoral. For, as Dr. Sasse has written in one of the most painstaking analysis of the theology of the Word as it is found also in our own church body: "How many human souls has the Church not harmed with such doctrines in a way that can never be made good again!" (The reference here is to a sentence near the end of Letter No. 14, dated August 1950, addressed to Lutheran pastors. This is a letter to which I am much indebted for some of the points in this present essay. My objective is a very simple one; namely, that we learn to appreciate our Lutheran heritage and begin to see the difference between the Lutheran view of Scriptures and that of Reformed Fundamentalism.

I. The Concept of Revelation

We shall proceed then to a discussion of the concept of revelation. Perhaps, in our present circumstances it is necessary to say with emphasis that we have only one source of authority as Lutherans -- the Scriptures! The Bible is not only our prima regula; it is our sola regula.

The Biblical contribution to the question as to whether sinful man can and does know God is a resounding negative. For our God, as St. Paul puts it, is one that "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6, 16). There is no way, from a Biblical point of

view, of bridging the deep chasm that separates men, as creatures, from God, their Creator, except on the initiative of the latter. "Truly", said the prophet, "Thou art a God who hidest Thyself" (Is. 45, 15). On this point Dr. Pieper seems to go beyond the Scriptures when he says (I, 445) that there is a natural knowledge of God which embraces "not only the recognition that there is a personal, eternal, almighty God who created the world, still preserves and rules it, but also the knowledge that God is a holy, just God, Who demands and rewards what is good, and forbids and punishes what is bad." The Formula of Concord is much more Biblical on this point when (SD, II, 9; Trigl., p. 883) it restricts whatever natural knowledge of God there may be to "a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as also of the doctrine of the law." What the Formula says is the view of St. Paul who limits man's natural knowledge of God to an awareness that God exists, that He is powerful, and that there is a divine law which men know they ought to respect.

From the Biblical point of view, then, "revelation" is a term to remind us of the limitations placed on our ability to know God or anything about Him. We cannot, on our own, know God. He must disclose Himself to us. And now -- praise be to God! -- the Scriptures move on to assert that we have not been left in ignorance, but that God has revealed Himself to men, not in His absolute essence, to be sure, but in terms of a personal relationship to specific persons and to a particular people. In fact, the greatest revelation we have of God is His Son, the Christ Incarnate, born as a descendant of David, but known as the Logos for the reason that He is the final expression (interpretation) of God to us. "No man has seen God at any time," the fourth evangelist quotes Jesus as saying; "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared him." (John 1, 18).

In this connection it may be useful to have a look at some of the phrases and words used by the sacred authors as they take cognizance of this matter of revelation. We shall begin with the Old Testament; and, after we have considered a few of the more significant Old Testament expressions, we shall proceed to an analysis of some of the crucial terms used in the New for the fact and the process of God's self-disclosure.

It is not a simple matter to set forth what the Old Testament teaches on the subject of revelation. It assumes, of course, that men are in contact with God only where He himself has broken in to offer Himself in communion. Whatever men get to know of God in this way, however, always remains fragmentary. At no time did God manifest Himself in His full majesty. His celestial splendor remained hidden even when He appeared in a bright cloud. For, as the Deuteronomic writer puts it, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God," even though, as he adds, "the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." (Dt. 29, 28)

At one point, we are told, Moses was not quite content to have only God's revealed presence attend Israel through the desert. The Hebrew of Exodus, chapter 33, uses the word "face" for God's presence at this point. This noun suggests that God dealt as a person with men as persons on those occasions when He revealed Himself. It implies, moreover, that God disclosed only so much of His being as He chose to make visible or audible in a particular situation.

Moses was not satisfied with this kind of manifestation. He asked for more. He was bold enough to request the privilege of seeing God in His full splendor. This petition, however, was denied him on the grounds that no human being can at any time see God in His absolute majesty and still live.

Yet Moses was given the privilege of seeing the Lord's goodness pass in review. That is to say, Israel's great leader was given a glimpse of all the mercy and grace God had in store for His people. This is the Biblical way of describing God as revealing Himself in those historic events which occurred to implement God's redemptive purpose and will for Israel. In these acts God's transcendence became immanent. In them we can see God, but only His back parts, as the ~~Exodus~~ account has it.

Some years before this the angel of the Lord had appeared to Moses, as we read, in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush that refused to be consumed. On that occasion God had revealed His name as being "I Am That I Am" rather than El Shaddai (The Mighty God). This almost untranslatable Hebrew imperfect may also be rendered as "I Will Be That I Will Be" or, "I Cause To Be What Comes Into Being". It is an open tense, so to speak, suggesting that even though God chose to disclose Himself at particular moments in specific places, yet, unlike the deities of other nations, He was bound neither to time nor to place. He is the God not only of Mt. Sinai, or Mt. Horeb, but also of Mount Nebo and Mt. Zion -- and of Calvary, for that matter. He is the God of Moses and of Joshua as he had been Abraham's Lord.

This abiding transcendence of God is brought out most clearly in the opening words of the speech Solomon delivered at the dedication of the Temple as a place for God "to dwell in forever" (I Kings 8, 13). This edifice had been erected according to Phoenician blueprints, oriented to the solar system. It faced five degrees south of east so that, at the Spring equinox, the sun would shine through the front gate all the way to the Holy of Holies for about five minutes. Now, lest any one conclude from all this that Yahweh might be no more than the sun-god, Solomon began his remarks -- and here the RSV has quite appropriately taken a reading from some LXX manuscripts into its text -- Solomon started his remarks by saying, "The Lord (Yahweh) has set the sun in the heavens." In other words, Yahweh is not part of the solar system: He is no element within the kosmos; He is no less than its Creator. What is more, Solomon added, "God has said that he would dwell in thick darkness." Here the Hebrew word for "to dwell" means to "alight for the night". In the LXX this is rendered as skeenoun, "to tent", the very word that is used of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1, 14).

Solomon pointed out that God had chosen to dwell in thick darkness. On the one hand, this was a reference to the presence of the ark in the windowless room known as the Holy of Holies. On the other, this is the language of dynamic symbolism, meant to describe the awesome mystery of God's gracious presence in the midst of His people. Here was an act of revelation; and yet God remained hidden. This serves as a reminder of the fact that the comprehension of man is unequal to the task of putting fully into words what God has done to break the silence of eternity.

Whatever the Scriptures record of God's activity is so put as to forestall any thought that He can be contained in either place, time, logic or language. The Biblical exegete, in other words, has the task of handling materials that deal with such divine realities as do indeed reach down into space and time and yet never fully become a part of either. God's ways are never completely captured in a formulation, whether it be a perfect deduction or a neatly structured syllogism. This is another way of saying that God always remains the subject of revelation even at the moment when He offers Himself in communion. In any relationship He creates in terms of revelation God is never less than God. For it is no less than Himself that He offers in revelation. This is the most significant insight both Karl Barth and Emil Brunner have given us on this matter. This view was taken up in so many words by the Statement on Scriptures adopted at the San Francisco Convention. This

document begins its main body of instruction by pointing out that in the Scriptures God reveals Himself. I am reliably told that when this formulation was presented to the Synodical Conference committee that drafted this statement, this particular way of talking about revelation was objected to by some of the men present on the grounds that it was Barthian. Well, it is! But it's one of the many truly Biblical insights for which the whole church must be grateful.

In the matter of revelation, the instance of Samuel may be instructive for our purposes. When he was still young, the word of the Lord was rare in Israel, the account tells us. (1 Samuel 3,1) Samuel himself did not yet know the Lord, because, as the sacred writer puts it, "the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." (3,7). Here the concepts word, revelation and knowledge occur together and in a certain sequence. God had chosen to remain hidden for a time. No word came from him. No action of His broke into the dreary routine of Israel's life. Each new day was just like yesterday, despite the ritual at Shiloh. Samuel, too, remained without knowledge of God until the latter chose to manifest Himself to His servant.

And how did the word of the Lord come to Samuel? When God called Him by name in the darkness of night, as one person addresses another. Revelation, you see, is essentially a dialog, in which God directs Himself to man in order to elicit an obedient response of the kind reflected in Samuel's answer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (3,10) Later on in the same chapter this word from the Lord is specifically referred to as God's revelation of Himself. We read, in verse 21, "The Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by a word of the Lord." He called into the night not only to choose Samuel as His prophet but to unfold His intent with Israel. And so "the word of Samuel came to all Israel", we read.

Revelation, then, is at times described as a process of God speaking to individuals. He said to Abraham, for instance, "Go from your country and from your kindred..." (Gen. 12, 1) We read of Him speaking to Moses again and again. Just what kind of experiences such expressions are intended to describe is impossible to say. In fact, such a question was of no interest at all to the sacred authors. They used this particular language to show that there are two poles in any act of revelation, God and man, and that God Himself must speak in order to break through in communion with His creatures. God does not contain Himself within the silence of eternity, but projects Himself into our history in order to communicate with man. He comes forward, so to speak. He shows his hand to intervene savingly for mankind.

Our Scriptures, then, speak of revelation as God's act of breaking into the closed circle of our existence for the purpose of making Himself known as the Lord of all life, all history and all nature. A rather common expression for God's approach to man is the phrase, "The word of the Lord came to..." Jeremiah, for example, saw the rod of an almond, or again, a boiling pot, facing away from the north. "This was a word of the Lord to Him". It is of the utmost importance to note that what we have in the book of the prophet Jeremiah is described in the opening verse as the prophet's words describing his personal encounters with the Lord God. It is from within this kind of experience that another great prophet, Isaiah, the son of Amoz, could declare that he saw the word of the Lord (2,1). It met his eyes, because the word of the Lord is, in the last analysis, God Himself confronting an individual.

In Biblical thought, then, revelation is the self-disclosure of God as a personal being to man as a person, that is to say, in action. Revelation, therefore, is not primarily a method of transmitting a body of information.

Quite the contrary, God reveals His being as it relates to men by what He does and by the intent and manner of His activity. The impartation of supernatural knowledge, especially of the future, may indeed occur. But this is always secondary to the main theme. The incident of Saul looking for his father's donkeys is illuminating in this connection. For when Saul came to Samuel to inquire about the donkeys, the answer concerned God's plans for His people. This concern for His people remains the content of revelation. No interpreter, therefore, will ever be able to manipulate the word of God, as He might master the content of a theorem in geometry. For the Lord Himself is always the subject of what is revealed in Scripture. There He is seen as one who acts. His word is in essence not a noun but a verb. God is always its subject. It directs itself to us. We can only respond to His self-disclosure -- either in faith by the Holy Spirit, or in unbelief. We cannot capture it. It always befalls us, touching the hollow of our thigh. It grasps us, as it were.

All this is clear from the Old Testament statements which deal with this matter. To this the New Testament adds its own ringing testimony. To be sure, there is no single term, either in the Old Testament or in the New, that corresponds precisely to our English term "revelation", with its philosophical concerns. Yet the New Testament, like the Old Testament, insists that the "traffic of Jacob's ladder" starts at the top.

At this point two words from the New Testament need to be considered in some detail. They are apokalypsis and phaneroosis, both of which are normally used to connote God's act of self-disclosure, both within history and at the end of time. The second of these two terms, we might add, is almost invariably used in contexts where time itself is of consequence.

Two passages, one from St. Peter, the other from St. Paul, may be cited to indicate the prime significance of phaneroosis as God's action of unveiling within history what had been decided on in eternity. The first statement is found in 1 Peter 1, 19-20, which reads "But you were set free by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and without blemish, chosen for this purpose before the world was founded, but manifested at the end of the ages..." Here we have a very direct statement describing the relationship between God's decision of grace before time began and the historic event by which His will and person were made known. This passage is a reminder, at the same time, of the fact that the Incarnation did not burst upon the vision of men unannounced. In fact, there is a very clear reference here to the slaying of the yearly passover lamb in Israel as an action pointing beyond itself to fulfilment at the end of the ages in a person who would suffer the same fate and for the same reason. An event in time, then, became the vehicle for revealing God's will and grace in Him whom we know as the Logos, God's expression of Himself. We must note especially that it was Christ Himself whom God revealed. The revelation did not consist of some teaching or idea about Him, but rather of the very person of the Messiah.

This method of revelation, including both promise and fulfilment, is used by St. Paul in a passage found in the third chapter of his letter to the Romans. There, beginning with the 21st verse, we have this striking remark, illustrating the significance of phaneroo: "In this present age, however, God's righteousness has been made manifest, as it was testified to by the law and the prophets..." Then there follows a description of what God did to make Himself plain as personally righteous and eager to declare men righteous on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus. Two steps in God's action are mentioned specifically: In eternity He decided that Christ Jesus should be the mercy-seat for men; and this decision was made manifest, it was historically realized, when Jesus shed His blood.

This event, in the language of St. Paul, was to accomplish a dual purpose. On the one hand it was to solve the puzzle of God's patience in dealing rather lightly with sins committed in days gone by; on the other, it was to show the extent to which God was willing to reach down among men in a desire for fellowship and communion. Just because God is righteous, Paul tells us, He set off a series of events by which He proposed to redeem men for service to Himself. The righteousness of God is just this determination of His to break out of His own isolation, so to speak, for the purpose of creating contact with His creatures on the basis of mercy and grace. It is in this way that the silence of eternity was and is filled with the sound of God's condescension.

The second term from the New Testament we must consider is apokalypsis. Quite frequently this word occurs in a context dealing with the parousia, the appearance of Jesus Christ in His heavenly splendor at the end of time. There are a few passages, however, where the verb occurs in the present tense with reference to what is taking place right now among men. Two of these are found very close together in the first chapter of Romans. In verse seventeen the term is used of God's righteousness; in the very next, it has reference to the disclosure of God's anger.

This double usage is very informative. It clarifies the relationship prevailing between certain occurrences and their significance as means of God's self-disclosure. God is seen at work in His anger when we observe how men are abandoned to their own desires and designs because of their failure to follow whatever is known to them of God's existence and His power. This statement from the apostle helps us to understand what he had in mind when he said that God makes His righteousness known by the Gospel. It is evident from the immediate context that Paul used the word "gospel" at this point not only with reference to content but in its sense of activity, the work of proclaiming the good news. This implies that the church's preaching and teaching, in succession to the apostle Paul, are instruments of revelation. They are word of God, as Luther always insisted and as the earliest Lutheran confessional writings emphasized. God is at work when the Gospel is being proclaimed. That is His Word. This is His way of showing Himself to men as one who is anxious for communion on the basis of complete trust.

All of these considerations help us to appreciate why Professor Oepke of Leipzig, in his discussion of the subject of revelation in Kittel's Woerterbuch, says:

"Revelation is not the communication of supernatural knowledge, and not the stimulation of numinous feelings. Revelation can indeed give rise to knowledge and is necessarily accompanied by numinous feelings; yet it does not itself consist in these things but is quite essentially the action of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in fellowship."

From the Biblical point of view, therefore, revelation is God's way of offering Himself in communion. This means that in the revelatory process a person, a supernatural being, manifests Himself to us as individuals and as persons by the nature and purpose of the activity He has undertaken on our behalf. That is to say, we learn to know God from what He has done and still does for us. The content of the knowledge offered by the Scriptures, therefore, is God Himself in His redemptive purpose and activity -- and not a host of answers to a variety of subjects! Revelation can only take place from subject to subject, from mind to mind; it consists of God unveiling His own thoughts of grace and judgment to the human mind. This takes place only in the relationship of one person to other persons.

Such a relationship defies precise analysis. It is a deeply mysterious process. Yet in the unfolding of this mystery we are assured that nothing less than God's own will and intent are being disclosed. Accordingly, in the Biblical perspective, what is revealed to us is not chiefly a body of information concerning various things of which we might otherwise be ignorant. If it is information at all, it has to do with whatever attends a glimpse into the very heart of God in His redemptive concern for us.

II. The Means of Revelation

We have now established the fact that in the Biblical view revelation is "an opening of the door from within, without waiting for the knock from outside." Without this presupposition the Scriptures remain a closed book. For it is the Living God to whom the Bible introduces us. Now we must proceed to a discussion of the means God has employed to reveal himself to men. These deserve a fuller treatment than the occasional references made to them in our previous description of the concept of revelation.

As already indicated in our first section, one of the terms most frequently used in the language of revelation is "the word of God". This phrase occurs in the Old Testament as dabhar Yahweh (Elohim) in some combination or other no less than 400 times. Now, it so happens that dabhar does not mean word only; it is frequently used of God's acts. In fact this whole distinction between word and act, between logos and ergon, is a Greek idea, which is not reflected in Biblical usage at all. Even in John's Gospel doing and saying occur as practically synonymous, as for example, in 8:28: "...I do nothing on my own but speak thus as the Father taught me." The "word of God" is used particularly with reference to those acts of God by which He manifested His redemptive concern and power.

These mighty acts of God are occasionally referred to as niphloth in the Hebrew and as aretai in Greek. They are of such a nature as to reveal the "mighty arm of God" at work to liberate and to redeem. A typical series of such divine interventions is described in Psalm 78. Very significantly the very mention of the deeds of the Lord is called teaching, pointing up the pedagogical significance of the fact that the doctrine of Scripture is derived from a response to and a reflection upon God's mighty acts. Biblical theology, therefore, is basically recital theology. Psalm 136, which Carl Schuetz once set to music, would be another example of this type.

In the Old Testament the greatest of all of God's "words" was the Exodus. This was the divinely creative dabhar by which Israel became God's community. From then on God's "word" came to men within the life and experience of this people; and the record of them was made in Israel as God's "kingdom of priests." The Exile, and particularly the return from Babylon, were further acts of revelation. Behind all of these, of course, in terms of chronology stood the creation of the universe. In the New Testament it is the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and especially the Resurrection (including the Ascension and the Session) that rank as the mightiest acts of God. These, too, were recorded and witnessed to by persons of the new community, the church. In a very real sense, therefore, we must think of our Scriptures as the book of the people of God, created under the influence of the Holy Spirit within the worshipping community of both testaments.

Of and by themselves the great occurrences recorded in Scripture meant nothing much. To be sure, the Egyptians are described (Ex. 14) as having been able to conclude from Israel's escape that Yahweh was the Lord. But in this case such an insight remained without redemptive significance. So God raised up individuals who were given special illumination, sometimes called inspiration, which enabled them to see the theological significance of, let us say,

the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar or of Israel's return from the captivity. By being so interpreted these historic occasions became events. That is to say, they were creative occurrences producing desired effects.

Now, a very unique feature of the Biblical revelation is this that the "words of God", His mighty acts, must always be understood in their particular setting within history. Revelation does not consist in unveiling truths unattached to a particular occasion. God did not hurl His absolutes -- not even His Ten Commandments -- out into the universe at random. On the contrary, the manifestations He gave of Himself and of His will are bound to specific historical contexts. They are pegged down in terms of time and locale. This, by the way, is peculiar to the Scriptures. The events it records are part and parcel of history. In fact, we confront an historical particularity in God's revelation that has scandalized people. The old jingle, for example, says, "How odd to God To choose the Jews."

To illustrate the significance of historical peculiarity for revelation, we might take the case of John the Baptist. His activities, his words and even his dress served as instruments of revelation. The last chapters of Isaiah had sounded out the good news that God would reign. Malachi had ended his prophecies with a reference to the return of Elijah before the coming of the great day of the Lord. These two ideas joined forces in the development of Israel's thought-life to create the image of the Messenger (mebasseer) who would precede the Messiah. To fulfil this expectation, John the Baptist came into the desert of Judea, dressed like Elijah, and appropriating to himself and his task those words from Isaiah 40 which spoke of Israel's return from captivity. Here we have factual rather than verbal revelation. Whatever words John spoke were uttered to interpret his own coming in terms of the returning remnant. His very appearance in the desert of Judea was a way of saying that the time for creating a new people of God had come.

Here, incidentally, we confront the phenomenon of recapitulation, a subject to which Irenaeus was the first church father to devote a great deal of formal discussion. Strictly speaking, history does not repeat itself. In this respect it is unlike nature with its recurrence of seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. Hence it is not possible to define an historic event. It belongs to no class of things. It is sui generis. In history, therefore, we have to be content with description. Despite this fact, however, God used several variations of certain recurring themes in the work of revealing Himself to men. The repetition of previous patterns in divine intervention became the hallmark of genuineness in later redemptive events.

The whole cluster of events surrounding Israel's exodus became a type of future interventions from God. Israel was liberated at the Red Sea, baptized in its water, as St. Paul puts it. In its wake there were to follow other acts of redemption. When the time for gathering a new people of God had come, John appeared in the desert, baptizing with water. His coming was interpreted to be a new exodus as seen in the light of Israel's later return from Babylon.

Or again, Israel had eaten manna in the desert. In remembering this past miracle at their festivals, God's people looked forward to a time when the Lord would once more do such a sign. And so Jesus fed the five thousand and the four thousand, in this way revealing Himself as the Messiah and indicating thereby that the Messianic age had come in fulfilment of expectations born of Israel's previous experiences with the God of promise. In the sixth chapter of his Gospel, the evangelist John goes to great lengths in spelling out the nature of this recapitulation, interpreting the miracle of the loaves in terms of fulfilment rather than mere repetition.

This introduces us to the uniquely Biblical concept of fulfilment. It has to do with history, but not as continuous linear movement. When the New Testament speaks of the fullness of time it points to a center in history, to a period when certain events took place that have meaning for all time. They had not occurred before and will not happen again. But at the same time they give meaning not only to the story of God's dealings with His own people but to the whole story of mankind. Their quality is such as to give us a clue to the meaning of history as a whole.

To understand the Bible it is important to realize that fulfilment means more than the verbal correspondence between the description of a New Testament event and some prophetic utterance in the Old. It is much bigger than the idea of some word of prophecy coming to rest at a prescribed point and a predicted person, although this is included. From a Biblical point of view all of the history that went into the creation and preservation of Israel as God's people centers in Jesus Christ. This is why Matthew can without further ado apply the words of Hosea, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" to the return of Jesus from Egypt. The temptations that befell Israel in the desert overtook Jesus under similar surroundings. He came as the true Israel, God's first-born, His chosen one. In fact, to Him are applied the very adjectives used of Israel in the Old Testament.

We must add to this the observation that the person and work of Jesus embodied also the experience and destiny of the new Israel, the church. He could speak of His risen body as a temple. In a very real sense the church is both this body and this temple. Both the past and the future of God's people are described as coming to rest in Jesus Christ. This is the full significance of John 5, 39, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." On this basis we must insist that Jesus stands at the very center of time, as the fulfilment of all of God's ancient acts and words of promise.

The revelation of God, therefore, occurs within history and, in fact, through history as seen from within the community of God's people. To this story of God's Redemptive activity we sometimes apply the term Heilsgeschichte, which has been variously interpreted as holy history, or the history of redemption, or even saving history. Now, the Scriptures are quite explicit in their insistence that the events recorded are not to be thought of as occurring next to history or possibly above it. On the contrary, the fabric of these occurrences, involving man's redemption, is made to a high degree of the same stuff as the rest of the history of the ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman culture. In fact, the archaeological discoveries of the last century have demonstrated the large extent to which Israel belonged to the social and cultural milieu of the total Fertile Crescent. Moreover, Luke's insistence on the precise historical context of John's ministry, the description of Jesus' trial as having taken place under Pontius Pilate, as well as the rather detailed account we have of Paul's activities -- all these things testify to a close connection between these events and what was taking place in the world around them. None of these things happened in a corner, so to speak, but at the very crossroads of the ancient world.

Yet their significance in terms of God's purposes was not understood except from within God's community. God revealed Himself only in the covenant relationship. The meaning of such events as the Babylonian exile or the activity of the early church were usually misread by such as had not come into the circle of God's truth. There was really nothing para-historical or supra-historical in the structure of these occurrences. Yet they were seen as mighty acts of God only in the light of the interpretation put on them by prophet, apostle, poet, wise man, teacher and evangelist - inspired by God's Spirit to do just this.

With this observation we reach the point where we must raise the issue of the Bible's relationship to revelation. This is in essence the question of the connection between revelation and inspiration. From another point of view it is the problem, "In what sense is the Bible the word of God?"

The Scriptures are unlike the Book of Mormon, which is said to have come into being as a result of a single miraculous discovery of five golden tablets in a hillside at Palmyra, N.Y. Our Bible is the record of God's revelatory acts. At the same time its documents are a witness to God's redeeming will and actions. That is to say, no sacred writer ever remained uninvolved and uncommitted. No Biblical author ever wrote from a neutral point of view, or objectively, as historians often say today. St. Mark, for instance, did not set out to compose a life of Christ in the sense of a biography. In his book he proposed to present Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of Man, with all that this title implies. St. John did not remain a mere spectator to our Lord's suffering. He wrote it in terms of redemptive significance and as one determined to show that Jesus was indeed the son of God.

The Biblical documents offer us, therefore, personal testimony, with an interpretation of events, the meaning that God wanted these occurrences to have for men in terms of their salvation. This is the sense in which they are inspired. They say and contain only what men can say "in the Spirit"; namely, that Jesus is the Lord. We can say, therefore, that by "inspiration we mean the phenomenon which consists of the Holy Ghost placing God's Word of revelation into the heart of a person for oral proclamation or written deposition, so that it must be said without equivocation of the word that is thus spoken or written that it is the Word of God." (Sasse) This is a divine action different from providence in general or that Concursus divinus according to which God is active in the actions of His creation. Nor is this inspiration the kind of assistance from the Holy Ghost which was provided, for example, when Luther translated the Bible. By inspiration we mean something very special, by which God's Holy Spirit provided both the insight into God's saving acts and the words to describe them.

In consequence the Scriptures have a quality that is known as theopneustia. This is a term created from the expression in 2 Timothy 3, 16, where we read, according to the King James Version, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..." Here the Greek has theopneustos. In passing, it should be noted that this particular way of doing 2 Tim. 3, 16 does not occur in Luther's translation. Moreover, when Dr. Stoeckhardt interpreted this passage, he used the other possible translation; namely, "Every Scripture, inspired as it is of God, is profitable for instruction," etc. In this rendering the thought of theopneustia is subordinate to the main sentence which describes the Scriptures as being "profitable for instruction..." This is no doubt the reason why our Lutheran Confessions never use 2 Tim. 3, 16 to prove inspiration, but only to describe the effectiveness of the Bible. The passage is used four times in the Formula of Concord but only in the latter sense. Our early Lutheran fathers used 2 Peter 1, 19-21 to argue for inspiration, although in that passage "being carried along by the Holy Spirit" is used of holy men speaking rather than writing -- not that there is a great deal of difference between these two!

Now, we must hasten to add that nowhere in Scripture do we have any explanation or description of this theopneustia. We are nowhere told precisely how this inspiration worked. Least of all is there a psychological analysis of it, as there is in some of the pseudepigraphical works such as the Shepherd of Hermas or the Book of Enoch. This is a most important point to make and to keep in mind. For it is right here that much of our difficulty in the church has its source. For somehow we have got into the notion that this inspiration

took place in a certain way, as though it must necessarily exclude such things as the use of sources, the editing of documents, the formation of oral tradition.

Now, Luther himself, after whom our church has its name, did not have a limited view of theopneustia. Some of his extremely liberal remarks have been gathered together in volume one of his Tischreden as given in the Weimar Ausgabe, especially on page 209. Of Kings he said,

"Die Buecher der Koenige sind nur der Jueden Kalender, in welchen ordentlich beschrieben sind die Koenige, wie sie regiert haben, einer so, der andere also."

This sounds very contemporary, in deed. It is usually suggested today that the materials we have in the Books of the Kings was first formed as pericopes for religious services or other kinds of clutic observances.

Of Job Luther said that the author, whoever he may have been, found the story in the cultural milieu of his day, added characters, invented dialogue, and out of that came the book we now have. In fact he says,

"Gleichwie Vergilius den theuren Helden Aeneam beschreibt, und fuehret ihn durch alle Wasser, Meer and Herbergen, macht einen feinen, politischen Welt und Kriegsmann aus ihm. Und es scheint und laasset sich ansehen, dass ein grosser Theologus muss gewesen sein, der dies Buch gemacht und geschrieben hat, er sey gewest, wer er wolle."

Now, this is not all that Luther said about Job. However, the very fact that he spoke like this at all indicates with what freedom he viewed the whole "God-breathedness" of the Scriptures. He did not know about Formgeschichte. This method had not yet been developed. But judging from the remarks given above -- and there are others like them! --, he would have used the constructive features of this contemporary methodology without too much difficulty.

Theopneustia means that the Scriptures came into being under the creative guidance of God's Spirit. It is a concept taken from the first chapters of Genesis, where man is described as coming into being when God breathed in man's nostrils the breath of life. With respect to the Scriptures this includes all the factors that went into the creation of the Scriptures; the liturgy and rites of Israel, the work of editors, research into documents, as Luke tells us, oral tradition, such as helped shape the materials the evangelists used for their Gospels, the use of secretaries, such as Tertius or Silvanus in the instances of Paul and Peter, or Baruch in the case of Jeremiah.

In fact, there is included in theopneustia the translation of the Septuagint; for it is this version that Paul uses most frequently, even where it mis-translates, as in the famous case of 1 Corinthians 15, 55, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Here the Hebrew actually reads, "Death is swallowed up forever," but the LXX translates the Hebrew nezach (forever) as nikos (victory). In this connection I should like to suggest that this is possibly the way we ought to consider Matthew's use of the LXX parthenos from Isaiah 7. 14, where the Hebrew has 'almah'. The LXX translation constitutes a further revelation from God that Immanuel would be born not only of a young woman but of a virgin.

Unhappily quite early in the church's life a Greek and unBiblical view of this theopneustia was introduced into the church's thought and life. It got in by way of Alexandria, where Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, had become

the theoretician of inspiration as far as the Old Testament is concerned. The early Christian apologists took over his views. They thought of inspiration as a formal process and an actual fact which had nothing particular to do with content. They commended the Scriptures to the intellectuals among the Greeks on the basis of fulfilment of prophecy, for instance. We call this the formal principle, represented in the days before Luther especially by William Occam and repudiated by Luther in his insistence that the Scriptures are inspired not because we know anything about the process, but because they testify to that which only the Holy Spirit can get men to see and say; namely, that Jesus is Christ the Lord.

held

This is not the view by the early apologists. They explained inspiration with the ancient pagan picture of ekstasis or mania, likening the human spirit to a musical instrument which begins to play as the divine pneuma touches it. In the case of Justin Martyr it is the zither; Athenagoras likens the human spirit to a flute and the Holy Spirit to a plektron. This is the view of inspiration Augustine took over and through him became normative for the middle ages. Even though Luther broke out of this system, tyrannized over by the formal principle, it soon got back into Protestantism including Lutheranism, alas! It is one of the ironies of history that the Gnesio-Lutheran Matthias Flacius, who wrote the first modern text on Hermeneutics, Clavis Scripturae, should have taken over the ancient Greek notion of inspiration as Calvin introduced it to Protestantism in his Institutes of 1543.

A possible explanation of this strange development might be that the Lutheran churches never followed through on their early confessional writings to formulate a doctrine of the Word. Possible it didn't seem necessary in the days of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology and the Formula to take up the question of the Scriptures. Nevertheless the emphasis of the Ansbacher Ratschlag and the Nuernberger Ratschlag (1524) is reflected in the Apology's insistence that one cannot understand the Scriptures without first having come to faith in Jesus Christ. For it should be noted that the earliest Lutheran confessional documents consistently speak of the Word of God as, first of all, being Jesus Christ; secondly, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ; thirdly, the written Scriptures. This is Luther's position, too. This precedence of sola fide is reflected in our own Synodical seal, where this principle is made basic to sola Scriptura and sola gratia.

Now, it was a treacherous development that Lutheran theology, instead of developing a doctrine concerning Scripture and its inspiration from Luther's teaching, took over without criticism the ancient Greek view of inspiration, especially that of Augustine as presented by Calvin. In fact, Flacius made this the hall mark of orthodoxy. And so we see the giants of the period of orthodoxy fighting Roman Catholic theologians not with a Lutheran view of the Scriptures but with Roman Catholic weapons. Small wonder they got backed into a corner in the matter of inspiration, finally resorting to the curious dodge that only the autographs were really inspired. This, by the way, is poor comfort; for we don't have the originals, not a single one. That kind of scripture is simply non-existent.

In modern times the formal view of inspiration became articulate especially in Reformed fundamentalism. It is expressed most precisely in a series of twelve little volumes that some laymen got out originally, beginning with 1909, known as The Fundamentals, with the motto "To the Law and to the Testimony" (Is. 8,20). These pamphlets list five fundamentals: 1) belief in the Virgin Birth; 2) the vicarious atonement; 3) the resurrection; 4) the millenium; and, as the basis of all, the inerrancy of Scripture. This last point is the first in Fundamentalism. "We believe", it says, "in the Scripture of the Old and New Testament as the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original text, and as the highest and final authority for faith and life." It is this particular emphasis that has misled many Christians.

into believing that Christian faith is belief in a book. That is how the Brief Statement is often interpreted.

This Statement taken out of its historical context is now made to mean that the first requirement is to believe a book. This inverts the Lutheran order, sola fide and then sola Scriptura, and flies in the face of the insistent emphasis of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession that in order to understand the Scriptures one must first know Christ. Possibly, it is necessary at this point to say that Dr. Pieper himself invariably started with Christology before discussing the subject of the Bible. In fact, in the printing of his Dogmatik volume 2 appeared before volume 1. This, I would suggest, is very significant for a proper understanding of any doctrine of the Bible.

Now, I mentioned at the outset that this whole matter would be considered from a pastoral point of view. The best way to do that is to point out that this ancient notion of inspiration, the formal principle, which got into the church by way of the Greek apologists, brings with it a theory of inerrancy that is quite misleading and cannot be sustained from the Scriptures themselves. Hollaz can serve as our example of this non-Biblical view of inerrancy. His argument - strictly rationalistic! goes like this:

1. Whatever proceeds immediately from God, the highest truth, ought to be perfectly true in the highest sense;
2. According to 2 Tim. 3, 16 the entire Scripture is theopneustos;
3. Therefore divine inspiration preserved the sacred amanuenses from every error.

(Exam. Theol. Acr. etc., Prol.III, qn. 18)

This is very good logic, but as poor theology as Calvin's conclusion that since some are predestined to eternal life, others must be predestined to damnation. And both are bad theology. Baier, whose Compendium, had a great deal of influence on our early decades as a Synod, argued that a Scriptures with discrepancies in it would be unworthy of the dignity of God. That's exactly what the Greeks used to say about the incarnation: it is unworthy of God to become man. But God did become incarnate; He did become one of us and shared our life and existence. Luther is most eloquent in his treatment of the Christmas story to show how completely the Christ became one of us even as a little child. So likewise we may say that surely God would not give us a Bible that shares in limitations of the authors' lives and times. We might wish the Scriptures to contain documents from which the glory of the Lord would shine forth. The fact is that God ~~did~~ choose to do it that way.

In His grace God decided to condescend to our level, all the way. This is what John Chrysostom, and others after him, called sunkatabasis, a stooping down to our level. For let us make no mistake about it: the Scriptures are both fully divine and fully human. It is God's Word and man's word. One might say that it is God's Word just because it is the word of men who were prophets, apostles, evangelists, and wise men.

We must beware of docetism in the doctrine of Scripture just as we must avoid it when we discuss the person of Christ. Psalm 51 is no make-believe; it is a flesh-and-blood confession of sins from David's lips, just as our Lord's agonizing prayer in Gethsemane is no sacred pantomime, but a real human suffering. The Bible speaks the truth, but in human language. It narrates history, but with the literary means of that time, and not of ours.

And its authors remain within the world-view of their time, with all of the limitations that this involves. Included in these limitations are statements of history, where we occasionally find what seems to be discrepancies. For instance, there is no way of reconciling the two varying accounts of the number of exiles returning from Babylon that we have in Nehemiah and Ezra. There is no way of working out a consistent genealogy when you compare Matthew's series of ancestors of our Lord with what the Old Testament gives us. There is no way of being absolutely sure as to just what the superscription on the Cross was; each evangelist has a different reading. Each of the three Synoptics gives us a different wording for what the Father said at Jesus' baptism.

But let us take as our example for study a passage of which Luther uses the expression "error gravis". The passage we will consider is Acts 7, 2-4, the beginning of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin.

Before we look at this we must keep in mind that Jesus had promised His followers, "When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Mt. 10, 19, 20) I'm quoting this ahead of time so that the discrepancies in what Stephen says can not blithely be dismissed by saying, "But Luke is inerrant when he records exactly what Stephen said." This is what a few Roman Catholic exegetes have actually said, operating from an a priori view of inspiration that is not derived from what we actually find to be the case in Scripture.

Stephen was the first of the martyrs. The first one to be dragged before a council intent on destroying him. If ever the promise of the Spirit's presence was fulfilled it was in the instance of Stephen. Now see what he says under the influence of this Spirit:

"Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him. 'Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you'. Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land..."

Now compare this with the end of Genesis 11 and the beginning of Genesis 12. The Genesis account says nothing of a call that came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. It is very specific in saying that Abram was called at Haran, after Terah and his whole family had moved there from Ur. And in case you say, "Well, there may have been a second call", I'll introduce you to the real conundrum. Stephen says that Abraham left Haran after his father died. Observe, however, the information we have in Genesis. In Gen. 11, 26 we read, "When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." In verse 4 of the next chapter it says that Abram "was 75 years old when he departed from Haran." But just a few verses before that we have the statement that Terah lived to be two hundred and five years old. Stephen says Abraham left Haran after his father died. According to the Genesis account Abram left when his father was 145 years of age. A little later Stephen says that 75 persons came down into Egypt with Pharaoh; our Hebrew Bible has the figure 70. In verse 16, just to complicate matters. Stephen has Jacob and all the patriarchs buried at Sychem. According to the Old Testament only Joseph was buried there; and Jacob was buried at Hebron. Furthermore, according to our old Testament, bought a burial site in the field of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite. Stephen says he bought a burial place at Sychem from the Sons of Emmor.

Even Dr. Engelder is stumped by all this. He says in The Scripture Cannot be Broken. But he adds that in the light of glory we'll understand all this. In the meantime we are to bow before the authority of Scripture, he suggests. That is very sound advice, and not only when there are discrepancies!

These discrepancies cannot be explained away on the theory of textual corruption. As a matter of fact from all the complicated textual studies that have been made of Acts 7, one solid conclusion can be drawn: it is just these difficult statements that are closest to the original and have the best textual support. The explanation can be found in the fact that Stephen, as we are expressly told, grew up as a Hellenist, with a Greek-Jewish background. And in the Greek tradition, as we know from Philo and Josephus, God's call came to Abram in Ur; and he left Haran after Terah had died. Moreover, the LXX has the figure 75 for the number of people that come to Egypt with Jacob. In other words, Stephen was speaking, under the influence of the Spirit; mind you, on the basis of the information he had on these historical points. When all is said and done, Luther says, "I'll take my stand with Moses here; he knew more about the subject."

This is a pastoral matter for you and me. You have sent girls and boys to college, secular institutions. Before long you noticed that they had become almost agnostic. Now, if you have ever taken the time to analyze the reason for this, you will have found that in many cases the faith of such young people was upset when some teacher called their attention to such discrepancies. He may have asked a simple question, like, "From what mountain did Jesus ascend into heaven?" Then, if the student said, "The Mount of Olives", the teacher might read the end of Matthew, which unmistakably suggests that he ascended from a mountain in Galilee.

What I'm trying to say is this: If you have built the faith of your confirmands on a theory of inspiration which does not take into full account what the Scriptures actually say, you have dealt unfairly with that child. This is what Dr. Sasse was referring to with the sentence I read near the beginning of this paper, "How many souls has the Church not harmed with such doctrines in a way that can never be made good again!"

For this reason it ought to be obvious that the word "inerrant" can be and usually is a very misleading term to use of the Scriptures. It is dangerous because it is a word that makes sense only in the light of a false view of inspiration -- one that got into the Church from ancient paganism and has been perpetuated by the Reformed-Fundamentalist tradition.

Now, in a way, I suppose, it would be much more interesting to have a book unmarred by human limitations, a book so unique in its formal aspect that it was obviously different from every other book. But it just doesn't happen to be that way. It is the material in the Scriptures that make them unique. That's what makes the Bible inspired: it says what can only be said "in the Spirit." It testifies to the Christ. Every last syllable of it does. That is verbal inspiration; and that is what makes it the Word of God. Being the Word of God, the Bible does not need any extra props to support it by way of theories of inspiration and inerrancy. It is quite able to take care of itself, if we will just let it speak.

I want to add here two formulations. One is Lutheran; the other is Reformed. One follows from the formal, the other from the material principle. It has been said, "The Scriptures are the Word of God, and as such they are inspired." That is Lutheran. The other formulation has it, "The Bible is inspired; therefore it is the Word of God." That is Reformed Fundamentalism. Between these two statements is a great gulf fixed. Unhappily the Brief Statement is usually interpreted in the light of the second and formal principle. That is why the whole question of the Scriptures, particularly its inerrancy, needs a great deal of airing before we commit ourselves to a final formulation.

In Lutheran theology, faith comes first. That is what distinguishes our doctrine of inspiration from that of the Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh Day Adventists--all of whom accept the formal principle of inspiration. They believe in the Bible as an inerrant book--and are lost! Their faith is in a book and not in Him to whom all the prophets and apostles bear witness, our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be glory throughout the Church both now and forevermore!

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

Martin H. Scharlemann

Delivered at the Western District Pastoral Conference at Jefferson City, Mo., 1959

Prefatory Remarks

Permit me to make four prefatory remarks before presenting the paper itself. They are set forth in the interest of general orientation.

In the first place, I want it understood that I am fully committed to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, without equivocation or mental reservation of any kind. Whatever, therefore, is presented in this essay is said from that fixed point.

Secondly, this paper is intended to be a contribution to a discussion which has become necessary, especially since the San Francisco convention accepted two statements on Scripture that do not fully agree. The difference between them is due in part to the thirty years that separate them in terms of their composition. What is said in the Brief Statement, on the one hand, and what appears in the Statement on Scripture, on the other, can serve as the two poles of the conference studies that ought to follow under the requirements of Resolution Nine. Following through on this Resolution could be a most constructive development in the life of the church; for it would bring the pastoral conferences of Synod into the total process of developing our theology and keeping it abreast of each new problem.

In the third instance, I am here at the invitation of your program committee with the specific request that I make this particular contribution to your program: a study of the concepts of revelation and inspiration. This is not the kind of problem one drags into a Seminary class room. It is one that is intended for your mature judgment. I am here to render a service that is concerned with preserving nothing less than our Lutheran heritage.

Fourthly, the relationship between revelation and inspiration is not covered in our Missouri Synod literature, except for a sentence or two in the Statement on Scripture prepared by a joint committee of the Synodical Conference and adopted at San Francisco. Now, if I come down heavy on the Lutheran view of this connection — well, this is because we call ourselves the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I should want nothing so much as to have my church continue to be Lutheran.

With these preliminary observations out of the way, let us proceed to the subject proper. I have called it simply —

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

During the earlier decades of our century the shadow of Adolph von Harnack lay over the theological pursuits of Europe and America. Any one who wanted to be relevant to that age had to take account of this giant. He was a true liberal, one who had come to the conclusion that the essence of Christianity could be expressed in the two propositions that God is the Father of all men, and that all men are brothers. Obviously, genuine Lutheran theologians had to disagree with him. But they could not avoid reckoning with his influence in theology. Our own Dr. Francis Pieper took issue most vigorously with von Harnack in a volume bearing the same title as von Harnack's book; namely, "What Is Christianity?"

Now, Dr. C.F.W. Walther could not have written this book. The issues to which Dr. Pieper's book addressed itself had not yet been raised in Walther's day. The latter had other problems to wrestle with. We make this rather elementary observation here just because it is sometimes forgotten that theology moves, that the issues of one generation are not those of another. The corollary of this, of course, is that one does not answer the problems of 1959 except by formulations and discussions that are born of today and not of yesterday.

This is not the age of liberalism but what is known as neo-orthodoxy. The theological Einstein of our day is not von Harnack but Karl Barth. The latter is no liberal. In fact, he deserves the thanks of all of us for having led the churches of Europe and America back into a study of the Scriptures with all that this change in direction implies. What he has said and written moves like a glacier through the whole terrain of theological discussion and writing of our generation. No one who is interested in speaking and writing relevantly for our day can ignore this glacial movement. We ourselves can remain unaffected and indifferent only at the cost of theological sterility.

In turning the Church's attention to the Scriptures themselves, Karl Barth has eloquently discussed the concept of revelation. Part two of the first volume in his Dogmatik is devoted very largely to a discussion of "Das Geheimnis der Offenbarung." What he has written has been well done; and it would be sheer folly to try to ignore it. For one thing, it is well nigh impossible to understand a modern theological text without having some awareness of Barth's position. And theology, my friends, is our business – not only as professors, but as pastors! For theology has to do with communicating and relating Biblical truth to a particular age and generation, that is to say, to our people of today.

We need to come to grips, therefore, with the notion of revelation, particularly as it relates to inspiration. In fact, I would venture the suggestion that this is the major task of our day. And so in this paper we propose to take up just this matter of revelation and inspiration. Our concern is not in this instance primarily academic, but pastoral. For, as Dr. Sasse has written in one of the most painstaking analysis of the theology of the Word as it is found also in our own church body: "How many human souls has the Church not harmed with such doctrines in a way that can never be made good again!" (The reference here is to a sentence near the end of Letter No. 14, dated August 1950, addressed to Lutheran pastors. This is a letter to which I am much indebted for some of the points in this present essay. My objective is a very simple one; namely, that we learn to appreciate our Lutheran heritage and begin to see the difference between the Lutheran view of Scriptures and that of Reformed Fundamentalism.

I. The Concept of Revelation

We shall proceed then to a discussion of the concept of revelation. Perhaps, in our present circumstances it is necessary to say with emphasis that we have only one source of authority as Lutherans – the Scriptures'. The Bible is not only our prima regula* it is our sola regula.

The Biblical contribution to the question as to whether sinful man can know God is a resounding negative. For our God, as St. Paul puts it, is one that "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see." (1 Tim. 6, 16), There is no way, from a Biblical point of

view, of bridging the deep chasm that separates men, as creatures, from God, their Creator, except on the initiative of the latter. "Truly", said the prophet, "Thou art a God who hidest Thyself" (Is. 45, 15). On this point Dr. Pieper seems to go beyond the Scriptures when he says (I, 445) that there is a natural knowledge of God which embraces "not only the recognition that there is a personal, eternal, almighty God who created the world, still preserves and rules it, but also the knowledge that God is a holy, just God, Who demands and rewards what is good, and forbids and punishes what is bad." The Formula of Concord is much more Biblical on this point when (SD, II,9; Trigl., p. 883) it restricts whatever natural knowledge of God there may be to "a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as also of the doctrine of the law." What the Formula says is the view of St. Paul who limits man's natural knowledge of God to an awareness that God exists, that He is powerful, and that there is a divine law which men know they ought to respect.

From the Biblical point of view, then, "revelation" is a term to remind us of the limitations placed on our ability to know God or anything about Him. We cannot, on our own, know God. He must disclose Himself to us. And now — praise be to God! — the Scriptures move on to assert that we have not been left in ignorance, but that God has revealed Himself to men, not in His absolute essence, to be sure, but in terms of a personal relationship to specific persons and to a particular people. In fact, the greatest revelation we have of God is His Son, the Christ Incarnate, born as a descendant of David, but known as the Logos for the reason that He is the final expression (interpretation) of God to us. "No man has seen God at any time," the fourth evangelist quotes Jesus as saying; "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared him." (John 1, 18).

In this connection it may be useful to have a look at some of the phrases and words used by the sacred authors as they take cognizance of this matter of revelation. We shall begin with the Old Testament; and, after we have considered a few of the more significant Old Testament expressions, we shall proceed to an analysis of some of the crucial terms used in the New for the fact and the process of God's self-disclosure.

It is not a simple matter to set forth what the Old Testament teaches on the subject of revelation. It assumes, of course, that men are in contact with God only where He himself has broken in to offer Himself in communion. Whatever men get to know of God in this way, however, always remains fragmentary. At no time did God manifest Himself in His full majesty. His celestial splendor remained hidden even when He appeared in a bright cloud. For, as the Deuteronomic writer puts it, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God," even though, as he adds, "the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." (Dt. 29, 28)

At one point, we are told, Moses was not quite content to have only God's revealed presence attend Israel through the desert. The Hebrew of Exodus, chapter 33, uses the word "face" for God's presence at this point. This noun suggests that God dealt as a person with men as persons on those occasions when He revealed Himself. It implies, moreover, that God disclosed only so much of His being as He chose to make visible or audible in a particular situation.

Moses was not satisfied with this kind of manifestation. He asked for more. He was bold enough to request the privilege of seeing God in His full splendor. This petition, however, was denied him on the grounds that no human being can at any time see God in His absolute majesty and still live.

Yet Moses was given the privilege of seeing the Lord's goodness pass in review. That is to say, Israel's great leader was given a glimpse of all the mercy and grace God had in store for His people. This is the Biblical way of describing God as revealing Himself in those historic events which occurred to implement God's redemptive purpose and will for Israel. In these acts God's transcendence became immanent. In them we can see God, but only His back parts, as the Exodus account has it.

Some years before this the angel of the Lord had appeared to Moses, as we read, in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush that refused to be consumed. On that occasion God had revealed His name as being "I Am That I Am" rather than El Shaddai (The Mighty God). This almost untranslatable Hebrew imperfect may also be rendered as "I Will Be That I Will Be" or, "I Cause To Be What Comes Into Being". It is an open tense, so to speak, suggesting that - even though God chose to disclose Himself at particular moments in specific places, yet, unlike the deities of other nations, He was bound neither to time nor to place. He is the God not only of Mt. Sinai, or Mt. Horeb, but also of Mount Nebo and Mt. Zion -- and of Calvary, for that matter. He is the God of Moses and of Joshua as he had been Abraham's Lord.

This abiding transcendence of God is brought out most clearly in the opening words of the speech Solomon delivered at the dedication of the Temple as a place for God "to dwell in forever" (I Kings 8, 13). This edifice had been erected according to Phoenician blueprints, oriented to the solar system. It faced five degrees south of east so that, at the Spring equinox, the sun would shine through the front gate all the way to the Holy of Holies for about five minutes. How, lest any one conclude from all this that Yahweh might be no more than the sun-god, Solomon began his remarks - and here the RSV has quite appropriately taken a reading from some LXX manuscripts into its text - Solomon started his remarks by saying, "The Lord (Yahweh) has set the sun in the heavens." In other words, Yahweh is not part of the solar system: He is no element within the kosmos; He is no less than its Creator. What is more, Solomon added, "God has said that he would dwell in thick darkness." Here the Hebrew word for "to dwell" means to "alight for the night". In the LXX this is rendered as skeenoun, "to tent", the very word that is used of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (John 1, 14).

Solomon pointed out that God had chosen to dwell in thick darkness. On the one hand, this was a reference to the presence of the ark in the windowless room known as the Holy of Holies. On the other, this is the language of dynamic symbolism, meant to describe the awesome mystery of God's gracious presence in the midst of His people. Here was an act of revelation; and yet God remained hidden. This serves as a reminder of the fact that the comprehension of man is unequal to the task of putting fully into words what God has done to break the silence of eternity.

Whatever the Scriptures record of God's activity is so put as to forestall any thought that He can be contained in either place, time, logic or language. The Biblical exegete, in other words, has the task of handling materials that deal with such divine realities as do indeed reach down into space and time and yet never fully become a part of either. God's ways are never completely captured in a formulation, whether it be a perfect deduction or a neatly structured syllogism. This is another way of saying that God always remains the subject of revelation even at the moment when He offers Himself in communion. In any relationship He creates in terms of revelation God is never less than God. For it is no less than Himself that He offers in revelation. This is the most significant insight both Karl Barth and Emil Brunner have given us on this matter. This view was taken up in so many words by the Statement on Scriptures adopted at the San Francisco Convention. This

document begins its main body of instruction by pointing out that in the Scriptures God reveals Himself. I am reliably told that when this formulation was presented to the Synodical Conference committee that drafted this statement, this particular way of talking about revelation was objected to by some of the men present on the grounds that it was Barthian. Well, it is! But it's one of the many truly Biblical insights for which the whole church must be grateful.

In the matter of revelation, the instance of Samuel may be instructive for our purposes. When he was still young, the word of the Lord was rare in Israel, the account tells us. (1 Samuel 3,1) Samuel himself did not yet know the Lord, because as the sacred writer puts it, "the Word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." (3,7). Here the concepts word, revelation and knowledge occur together and in a certain sequence. God had chosen to remain hidden for a time. No word came from him. No action of His broke into the dreary routine of Israel's life. Each new day was just like yesterday, despite the ritual at Shiloh. Samuel, too, remained without knowledge of God until the latter chose to manifest Himself to His servant.

And how did the word of the Lord come to Samuel? When God called Him by name in the darkness of night, as one person addresses another. Revelation, you see, is essentially a dialog, in which God directs Himself to man in order to elicit an obedient response of the kind reflected in Samuel's answer, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (3,10) Later on in the same chapter this word from the Lord is specifically referred to as God's revelation of Himself. We read, in verse 21, "The Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by a word of the Lord." He called into the night not only to choose Samuel as His prophet but to unfold His intent with Israel, And so "the word of Samuel came to all Israel", we read.

Revelation, then, is at times described as a process of God speaking to individuals. He said to Abraham, for instance, "Go from your country and from your kindred..." (Gen. 12, 1) We read of Him speaking to Moses again and again. Just what kind of experiences such expressions are intended to describe is impossible to say. In fact, such a question was of no interest at all to the sacred authors. They used this particular language to show that there are two poles in any act of revelation, God and man, and that God Himself must speak in order to break through in communion with His creatures. God does not contain Himself within the silence of eternity, but projects Himself into our history in order to communicate v/ith man. He comes forward, so to speak. He shows his hand to intervene savingly for mankind.

Our Scriptures, then, speak of revelation as God's act of breaking into the closed circle of our existence for the purpose of making Himself known as the Lord of all life, all history and all nature. A rather common expression for God's approach to man is the phrase, "The word of the Lord came to..." Jeremiah, for example, saw the rod of an almond, or again, a boiling pot, facing away from the north. "This was a word of the Lord to Him". It is of the utmost importance to note that what we have in the book of the prophet Jeremiah is described in the opening verse as the prophet's words describing his personal encounters with the Lord God. It is from within this kind of experience that another great prophet, Isaiah, the son of Amoz, could declare that he saw the word of the Lord (2,1). It met his eyes, because the word of the Lord is, in the last analysis, God Himself confronting an individual.

In Biblical thought, then, revelation is the self-disclosure of God as a personal being to man as a person, that is to say, in action. Revelation, therefore, is not primarily a method of transmitting a body of information.

Quite the contrary, God reveals His being as it relates to men by v/hat He does and by the intent and manner of His activity. The impartation of supernatural knowledge, especially of the future, may indeed occur. But this is always secondary to the main theme. The incident of Saul looking for his father's donkeys is illuminating in this connection. For when Saul come to Samuel to inquire about the donkeys, the answer concerned God's plans for His people. This concern for His people remains the content of revelation. No interpreter, therefore, will ever be able to manipulate the word of God, as He might master the content of a theorem in geometry. For the Lord Himself is always the subject of what is revealed in Scripture. There He is seen as one who acts. - His word is in essence not a noun but a verb. God is always it's subject. It directs itself to us. We can only respond to His self- disclosure - either in faith by the Holy Spirit, or in unbelief. We cannot capture it. It always befalls us, touching the hollow of our thigh. It grasps us, as it were.

All this is clear from the Old Testament statements which deal with this matter. To this the New Testament adds its own ringing testimony. To be sure, there is no single term, either in the Old Testament or in the New, that corresponds precisely to our English term "revelation", with its philosophical concerns. let the New Testament, like the Old Testament, insists that the "traffic of Jacob's ladder" starts at the top.

At this point two words from the New Testament need to be considered in some detail. They are apokalypsis and phaneroosis, both of which are normally used to connote God's act of self-disclosure, both within history and at the end of time. The second of these two terms, we might add, is almost invariably used in contexts where time itself is of consequence.

Two passages, one from St. Peter, the other from St. Paul, may be cited to indicate the prime significance of phanerosis as God's action of unveiling within history what had been decided on in eternity. The first statement is found in 1 Peter 1, 19-20, which reads "But you were set free by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and without blemish, chosen for this purpose before the world was founded, but manifested at the end of the ages..." Here we have a very direct statement describing the relationship between God's decision of grace before time began and the historic event by which His will and person were made known. This passage is a reminder, at the same time, of the fact that the Incarnation did not burst upon the vision of men unannounced. In fact, there is a very clear reference here to the slaying of the yearly passover lamb in Israel as an action pointing beyond itself to fulfilment at the end of the ages in a person who would suffer the same fate and for the same reason. An event in time, then, became the vehicle for revealing God's will and grace in Him whom we know as the Logos, God's expression of Himself. We must note especially that it was Christ Himself whom God revealed. The revelation did not consist of some teaching or idea about Him, but rather of the very person of the Messiah.

This method of revelation, including both promise and fulfilment, is used by St. Paul in a passage found in the third chapter of his letter to the Romans. There, beginning with the 21st verse, we have this striking remark, illustrating the significance of phaneroo: "In this present age, however, God's righteousness has been made manifest, as it was testified to by the law and the prophets..." Then there follows a description of what God did to make Himself plain as personally righteous and eager to declare men righteous on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus. Two steps in God's action are mentioned specifically: In eternity He decided that Christ Jesus should be the mercy-seat for men; and this decision was made manifest, it was historically realized, when Jesus shed His blood.

This event, in the language of St. Paul, was to accomplish a dual purpose. In the one hand it was to solve the puzzle of God's patience in dealing rather lightly with sins committed in days gone by; on the other, it was to show the extent to which God was willing to reach down among men in a desire for fellowship and communion. Just because God is righteous, Paul tells us, He set off a series of events by which He proposed to redeem men for service to Himself. The righteousness of God is just this determination of His to break out of His own isolation, so to speak, for the purpose of creating contact with His creatures on the basis of mercy and grace. It is in this way that the silence of eternity was and is filled with the sound of God's condescension.

The second term from the New Testament we must consider is apokalypsis. Quite frequently this word occurs in a context dealing with the parousia, the appearance of Jesus Christ in His heavenly splendor at the end of time. There are a few passages, however, where the verb occurs in the present tense with reference to what is taking place right now among men. Two of these are found very close together in the first chapter of Romans. In verse seventeen the term is used of God's righteousness; in the very next, it has reference to the disclosure of God's anger.

This double usage is very informative. It clarifies the relationship prevailing between certain occurrences and their significance as means of God's self-disclosure. God is seen at work in His anger when we observe how men are abandoned to their own desires and designs because of their failure to follow whatever is known to them of God's existence and His power. This statement from the apostle helps us to understand what he had in mind when he said that God makes His righteousness known by the Gospel. It is evident from the immediate context that Paul used the word "gospel" at this point not only with reference to content but in its sense of activity, the work of proclaiming the good news. This implies that the church's preaching and teaching, in succession to the apostle Paul, are instruments of revelation. They are word of God, as Luther always insisted and as the earliest Lutheran confessional writings emphasized. God is at work when the Gospel is being proclaimed. That is His Word. This is His way of showing Himself to men as one who is anxious for communion on the basis of complete trust.

All of these considerations help us to appreciate why Professor Oepke of Leipzig, in his discussion of the subject of revelation in Kittel's Woerterbuch, says:

"Revelation is not the communication of supernatural knowledge, and not the stimulation of numinous feelings. Revelation can indeed give rise to knowledge and is necessarily accompanied by numinous feelings; yet it does not itself consist in these things but is quite essentially the action of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in fellowship."

From the Biblical point of view, therefore, revelation is God's way of offering Himself in communion. This means that in the revelatory process a person, a supernatural being, manifests Himself to us as individuals and as persons by the nature and purpose of the activity He has undertaken on our behalf. That is to say, we learn to know God from what He has done and still does for us. The content of the knowledge offered by the Scriptures, therefore, is God Himself in His redemptive purpose and activity – and not a host of answers to a variety of subjects'. Revelation can only take place from subject to subject, from mind to mind; it consists of God unveiling His own thoughts of grace and judgment to the human mind. This takes place only in the relationship of one person to other persons.

Such a relationship defies precise analysis. It is a deeply mysterious process. Yet in the unfolding of this mystery we are assured that nothing less than God's own will and intent are being disclosed. Accordingly, in the Biblical perspective, what is revealed to us is not chiefly a body of information concerning various things of which we might otherwise be ignorant. If it is information at all, it has to do with whatever attends a glimpse into the very heart of God in His redemptive concern for us.

II. The Means of Revelation

We have now established the fact that in the Biblical view revelation is "an opening of the door from within, without waiting for the knock from outside." Without this presupposition the Scriptures remain a closed book. For it is the Living God to whom the Bible introduces us. Now we must proceed to a discussion of the means God has employed to reveal himself to men. These deserve a fuller treatment than the occasional references made to them in our previous description of the concept of revelation.

As already indicated in our first section, one of the terms most frequently used in the language of revelation is "the word of God". This phrase occurs in the Old Testament as dabhar Yahweh (Elohim) in some combination or other no less than 400 times. Now, it so happens that dabhar does not mean word only; it is frequently used of God's acts. In fact this whole distinction between word and act, between logos and ergon, is a Greek idea, which is not reflected in Biblical usage at all. Even in John's Gospel doing and saying occur as practically synonymous, as for example, in 8:28: "...I do nothing on my own but speak thus as the Father taught me." The "word of God" is used particularly with reference to those acts of God by which He manifested His redemptive concern and power.

These mighty acts of God are occasionally referred to as niphloth in the Hebrew and as aretai in Greek. They are of such a nature as to reveal the "mighty arm of God" at work to liberate and to redeem. A typical series of such divine interventions is described in Psalm 78. Very significantly the very mention of the deeds of the Lord is called teaching, pointing up the pedagogical significance of the fact that the doctrine of Scripture is derived from a response to and a reflection upon God's mighty acts. Biblical theology, therefore, is basically recital theology. Psalm 136, which Carl Schuetz once set to music, would be another example of this type.

In the Old Testament the greatest of all of God's "words" was the Exodus. This was the divinely creative dabhar by which Israel became God's community. From then on God's "word" came to men within the life and experience of this people; and the record of them was made in Israel as God's "kingdom of priests." The Exile, and particularly the return from Babylon, were further acts of revelation. Behind all of these, of course, in terms of chronology stood the creation of the universe. In the New Testament it is the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and especially the Resurrection (including the Ascension and the Session) that rank as the mightiest acts of God. These, too, were recorded and witnessed to by persons of the new community, the church. In a very real sense, therefore, we must think of our Scriptures as the book of the people of God, created under the influence of the Holy Spirit within the worshipping community of both testaments.

Of and by themselves the great occurrences recorded in Scripture meant nothing much. To be sure, the Egyptians are described (Ex. 14) as having been able to conclude from Israel's escape that Yahweh was the Lord. But in this case such an insight remained without redemptive significance. So God raised up individuals who were given special illumination, sometimes called inspiration, which enabled them to see the theological significance of, let us say,

the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar or of Israel's return from the captivity. By being so interpreted these historic occasions became events. That is to say, they were creative occurrences producing desired effects,

Now, a very unique feature of the Biblical revelation is this that the "words of God", His mighty acts, must always be understood in their particular setting within history. Revelation does not consist in unveiling truths unattached to a particular occasion. God did not hurl His absolutes – not even His Ten Commandments – out into the universe at random. On the contrary, the manifestations He gave of Himself and of His will are bound to specific historical contexts. They are pegged down in terms of time and locale. This, by the way, is peculiar to the Scripture®. The events it records are part and parcel of history. In fact, we confront an historical particularity in God's revelation that has scandalized people. The old jingle, for example, says, "How odd to God To choose the Jews,"

To illustrate the significance of historical peculiarity for revelation, we might take the case of John the Baptist. His activities, his words and even his dress served as instruments of revelation. The last chapters of Isaiah had sounded out the good news that God would reign. Malachi had ended his prophecies with a reference to the return of Elijah before the coming of the great day of the Lord. These two ideas joined forces in the development of Israel's thought-life to create the image of the Messenger (mebasseeer) who would precede the Messiah. To fulfil this expectation, John the Baptist came*? into the desert of Judea, dressed like Elijah, and appropriating to himself and his task those words from Isaiah 40 which spoke of Israel's return from captivity. Here we have factual rather than verbal revelation. Whatever words John spoke were uttered to interpret his own coming in terms of the returning remnant. His very appearance in the desert of Judea was a way of saying that the time for creating a new people of God had come.

Here, incidentally, we confront the phenomenon of recapitulation, a subject to which Irenaeus was the first church father to devote a great deal of formal discussion. Strictly speaking, history does not repeat itself. In this respect it is unlike nature with its recurrence of seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. Hence it is not possible to define an historic event. It belongs to no class of things. It is sui generis. In history, therefore, we have to be content with description. Despite this fact, however, God used several variations of certain recurring themes in the work of revealing Himself to men. The repetition of previous patterns in divine intervention became the hallmark of genuineness in later redemptive events.

The whole cluster of events surrounding Israel's exodus became a type of future interventions from God. Israel was liberated at the Red Sea, baptized in its water, as St. Paul puts it. In its wake there were to follow other arts of redemption. When the time for gathering a new people of God had come, John appeared in the desert, baptizing with water. His coming was interpreted to be a new exodus as seen, in the light of Israel's later return from Babylon,

Or again, Israel had eaten manna in the desert. In remembering this past miracle at their festivals, God's people looked forward to a time when the Lord would once more do such a sign. And so Jesus fed the five thousand and the four thousand, in this way revealing Himself as the Messiah and indicating thereby that the Messianic age had come in fulfilment of expectations born of Israel's previous experiences with the God of promise. In the sixth chapter of his Gospel, the evangelist John goes to great lengths in spelling out the nature of this recapitulation, interpreting the miracle of the loaves in terms of fulfilment rather than mere repetition.

This introduces us to the uniquely Biblical concept of fulfilment. It has to do with history, but not as continuous linear movement. Then the New Testament speaks of the fullness of time it points to a center in history, to a period when certain events took place that have meaning for all time. They had not occurred before and will not happen again. But at the same time they give meaning not only to the story of God's dealings with His own people but to the whole story of mankind. Their quality is such as to give us a clue to the meaning of history as a whole.

To understand the Bible it is important to realize that fulfilment means more than the verbal correspondence between the description of a New Testament event and some prophetic utterance in the Old. It is much bigger than the idea of some word of prophecy coming to rest at a prescribed point and a predicted person, although this is included. From a Biblical point of view all of the history that went into the creation and preservation of Israel as God's people centers in Jesus Christ. This is why Matthew can without further ado apply the words of Hosea, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" to the return of Jesus from Egypt. The temptations that befell Israel in the desert overtook Jesus under similar surroundings. He came as the true Israel, God's first-born, His chosen one. In fact, to Him are applied the very adjectives used of Israel in the Old Testament.

We must add to this the observation that the person and work of Jesus embodied also the experience and destiny of the new Israel, the church. He could speak of His risen body as a temple. In a very real sense the church is both this body and this temple. Both the past and the future of God's '* people are described as coming to rest in Jesus Christ. This is the? full significance of John 5,39i "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." On this basis we must insist* that Jesus stands at the very center of time, as the fulfilment of all of God's ancient acts and words of promise.

The revelation of God, therefore, occurs within history and, in fact, through history as seen from within the community of God's people. To this story of God's Redemptive activity we sometimes apply the term Heilsgeschichte, which has been variously interpreted as holy history, or the history of redemption, or even saving history. Now, the Scriptures are quite explicit in their insistence that the events recorded are not to be thought of as occurring next to history or possibly above it. On the contrary, the fabric of these occurrences, involving man's redemption, is made to a high degree of the same stuff as the rest of the history of the ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman culture. In fact, the archaeological discoveries of the last century have demonstrated the large extent to which Israel belonged to the social and cultural milieu of the total Fertile Crescent. Moreover, Luke's insistence on the precise historical context of John's ministry, the description of Jesus' trial as having taken place under Pontius Pilate, as well as the rather detailed account we have of Paul's activities - all these things testify to a, close connection between these events and what was taking place in the world around them. None of these things happened in a corner, so to speak, but at the very crossroads of the ancient world.

Yet their significance in terms of God's purposes was not understood except from within God's community. God revealed Himself only in the covenant relationship. The meaning of such events as the Babylonian exile or the activity of the early church were usually misread by such as had not come into the circle of God's truth. There was really nothing para-historical or supra-historical in the structure of these occurrences. Yet they were seen as mighty acts of God only in the light of the interpretation put on them by prophet, apostle, poet, wise man, teacher and evangelist - inspired by God's Spirit to do just this.

With this observation we reach the point where we must raise the issue of the Bible's relationship to revelation. This is in essence the question of the connection between revelation and inspiration. From another point of view it is the problem, "In what sense is the Bible the word of God?"

The Scriptures are unlike the Book of Mormon, which is said to have come into being as a result of a single miraculous discovery of five golden tablets in a hillside at Palmyra, N.Y. Our Bible is the record of God's revelatory acts. At the same time its documents are a witness to God's redeeming will and actions. That as to say, no sacred writer ever remained uninvolved and uncommitted. No Biblical author ever wrote from a neutral point of view, or objectively, as historians often say today. St. Mark, for instance, did not set out to compose a life of Christ in the sense of a biography. In his book he proposed to present Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of Man, with all that this title implies. St. John did not remain a mere spectator to our Lord's suffering. He wrote it in terms of redemptive significance and as one determined to show that Jesus was indeed the son of God.

The Biblical documents offer us, therefore, personal testimony, with an interpretation of events, the meaning that God wanted these occurrences to have for men in terms of their salvation. This is the sense in which they are inspired. They say and contain only what men can say "in the Spirit"; namely, that Jesus is the Lord. We can say, therefore, that by "inspiration we mean the phenomenon which consists of the Holy Ghost placing God's Word of revelation into the heart of a person for oral proclamation or written deposition, so that it must be said without equivocation of the word that is thus spoken or written that it is the Word of God." (Sasse) This is a divine action different from providence in general or that Concursus divinus according to which God is active in the actions of His creation. Nor is this inspiration the kind of assistance from the Holy Ghost which was provided, for example, when Luther translated the Bible, By inspiration we mean something very special, by which God's Holy Spirit provided both the insight into God's saving acts and the words to describe them.

In consequence the Scriptures have a quality that is known as theopneustia. This is a term created from the expression in 2 Timothy 3, 16, where we read, according to the King James Version, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God .." Here the Greek has theopneustos. In passing, it should be noted that this particular way of doing 2 Tim. 3, 16 does not occur in Luther's translation. Moreover, when Dr. Stoeckhardt interpreted this passage, he used the other possible translation; namely, "Every Scripture, inspired as it is of God, is profitable for instruction," etc. In this rendering the thought of theopneustia is subordinate to the main sentence which describes the Scriptures as being "profitable for instruction..." This is no doubt the reason why our Lutheran Confessions never use 2 Tim. 3i 16 to prove inspiration, but only to describe the effectiveness of the Bible. The passage is U6ed four times in the Formula of Concord but only in the latter sense. Our early Lutheran fathers used 2 Peter 1, 19-21 to argue for inspiration, although in that passage "being carried along by the Holy Spirit" is used of holy men speaking rather than writing – not that there is a great deal of difference between these two!

Now, we must hasten to add that nowhere in Scripture do we have any explanation or description of this theopneustia. We are nowhere told precisely how this inspiration worked. Least of all is there a psychological analysis of it, as there is in some of the pseudepigraphical works such as the Shepherd of Hermas or the Book of Enoch. This is a most important point to make and to keep in mind. For it is right here that much of our difficulty in the church has its source. For somehow we have got into the notion that this inspiration

took place in a certain way, as though it must necessarily exclude such thing, as the use of sources, the editing of documents, the formation of oral tradition.

Now, Luther himself, after whom our church has its name, did not have a limited view of theopneustia. Some of his extremely liberal remarks have been gathered together in volume one of his Tischreden as given in the Weimar Ausgabe, especially on page 209. Of Kings he said,

"Die Buecher der Koenige sind nur der Jueden Kalender,
in welchen ordentlich beschrieben sind die Koenige,
wie sie regiert haben, einer so, der andere also."

This sounds very contemporary, in deed. It is usually suggested today that the materials we have in the Books of the Kings was first formed as pericopes for religious services or other kinds of cultic observances.

Of Job Luther said that the author, whoever he may have been, found the story in the cultural milieu of his day, added characters, invented dialogue, and out of that came the book we now have. In fact he says,

"Gleichwie Vergilius den theuren Helden Aeneas beschreibt,
und fuehret ihn durch alle Wasser, Meer und Herbergen,
macht einen feinen, politischen Welt und Kriegsmann aus
ihm. Und es scheint und laesst sich ansehen, dass ein
grosser Theologus muss gewesen sein, der dies Buch gemacht
und geschrieben hat, er sey gewesen, wer er wolle."

Now, this is not all that Luther said about Job. However, the very fact that he spoke like this at all indicates with what freedom he viewed the whole "God-breathedness" of the Scriptures. He did not know about Formgeschichte. This method had not yet been developed. 'But judging from the remarks given above – and there are others like them! –, he would have used the constructive features of this contemporary methodology without too much difficulty.

Theopneustia means that the Scriptures came into being under the creative guidance of God's Spirit. It is a concept taken from the first chapters of Genesis, where man is described as coming into being when God breathed in man's nostrils the breath of life. With respect to the Scriptures this includes all the factors that went into the creation of the Scriptures: the liturgy and rites of Israel, the work of editors, research into documents, as Luke tells us, oral tradition, such as helped shape the materials the evangelists used for their Gospels, the use of secretaries, such as Tertius or Silvanus in the instances of Paul and Peter, or Baruch in the case of Jeremiah.

In fact, there is included in theopneustia the translation of the Septuagint; for it is this version that Paul uses most frequently, even where it mistranslates, as in the famous case of 1 Corinthians 15, 55, "Death is swallowed up in victory". Here the Hebrew actually reads, "Death is swallowed up forever", but the LXX translates the Hebrew nezach (forever) as nikos (victory). In this connection I should like to suggest that this is possibly the way we ought to consider Matthew's use of the LXX parthenos from Isaiah 7. 14, where the Hebrew has 'almah'. The LXX translation constitutes a further revelation from God that Immanuel would be born not only of a young woman but of a virgin.

Unhappily quite early in the church's life a Greek and unBiblical view of this theopneustia was introduced into the church's thought and life. It got in by way of Alexandria, where Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, had become

the theoretician of inspiration as far as the Old Testament is concerned. The early Christian apologists took over his views, They thought of inspiration' as a formal process and an actual fact which had nothing particular to do with content. They commended the Scriptures to the intellectuals among the Greeks on the basis of fulfilment of prophecy, for instance. We call this the formal principle, represented in the days before Luther especially by William Occam and repudiated by Luther in His insistence that the Scriptures are inspired not because we know anything about the process, but because they testify to that which only the Holy Spirit can get men to see and say; namely, that Jesus is Christ the Lord.

This is not the view held by the early apologists. They explained inspiration with the ancient pagan picture of ekstasis or mania, likening the human spirit to a musical instrument which begins to play as the divine pneuma touches it. In the case- of Justin Martyr "it is the zither; Athenagoras likens the human spirit to a flute and the Holy Spirit to a plektron. This is the view of inspiration Augustine took over and through him became normative for the middle ages. Even though Luther broke out of this system, tyrannized over by the formal principle, it soon got back into Protestantism including Lutheranism, alas! It is one of the ironies of history that the Gnesio-Lutheran Matthias Flacius, who wrote the first modern text on Hermeneutics, Clavis Scripturae, should have taken over the ancient Greek notion of inspiration as Calvin introduced it to Protestantism in his Institutes of 1543.

A possible explanation of this strange development might be that the Lutheran churches never followed through on their early confessional writings to formulate a doctrine of the Word. Possible it didn't seem necessary in the days of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology and the Formula to take up the question of the Scriptures. Nevertheless the emphasis of the Ansbacher Ratschlag and the Nuernberger Ratschlag (1524) is reflected in the Apology's insistence that one cannot understand the Scriptures without first having come to faith in Jesus Christ. For it should be noted that the earliest Lutheran confessional documents consistently speak of the Word of God as, first of all, being Jesus Christ; secondly, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ; thirdly, the written Scriptures. This is Luther's position, too. This precedence of sola fide is reflected in our own Synodical seal, where this principle is made basic to sola Scriptura and sola gratia.

Now, it was a treacherous development that Lutheran theology, instead of developing a doctrine concerning Scripture and its inspiration from Luther's teaching, took over without criticism the ancient Greek view of inspiration, especially that of Augustine as presented by Calvin. In fact, Flacius made this the hall mark of orthodoxy. And so we see the giants of the period of orthodoxy fighting Roman Catholic theologians not with a Lutheran view of the Scriptures but with Roman Catholic weapons. Small wonder they got backed into a corner in the matter of inspiration, finally resorting to the curious dodge that only the autographs were really inspired. This, by the way, is poor comfort; for we don't have the originals, not a single one. That kind of scripture is simply non-existent.

In modern times the formal view of inspiration became articulate especially in Reformed fundamentalism. It is expressed most precisely in a series of twelve little volumes that some laymen got out originally, beginning with 1909, known as The Fundamentals, with the motto "To the Law and to the Testimony" (Is. 8,20). These pamphlets list five fundamentals: 1) belief in the Virgin Birth; 2) the vicarious atonement; 3) the resurrection; of the millenium; and, as the basis of all, the inerrancy of Scripture. This last point is the first in Fundamentalism. "We believe", it says, "in the Scripture of the Old and New Testament as the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original text, and as the highest and final authority for faith and life." It is this particular emphasis that has misled many Christians

into believing that Christian faith is belief in a book. That is how the Brief Statement is often interpreted.

This Statement taken out of its historical context is now made to mean that the first requirement is to believe a book. This inverts the Lutheran order, sola fide and then sola Scriptura, and flies in the face of the insistent emphasis of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession that in order to understand the Scriptures one must first know Christ. Possibly, it is necessary at this point to say that Dr. Pieper himself invariably started with Christology before discussing the subject of the Bible. In fact, in the printing of his Dogmatik volume 2 appeared before volume 1. This, I would suggest, is very significant for a proper understanding of any doctrine of the Bible.

Now, I mentioned at the outset that this whole matter would be considered from a pastoral point of view. The best way to do that is to point out that this ancient notion of inspiration, the formal principle, which got into the church by way of the Greek apologists, brings with it a theory of inerrancy that is quite misleading and cannot be sustained from the Scriptures themselves. Hollaz can serve as our example of this non-Biblical view of inerrancy. His argument - strictly rationalistic! goes like this:

1. Whatever proceeds immediately from God, the highest truth, ought to be perfectly true in the highest sense;
2. According to 2 Tim. 3, 16 the entire Scripture is theopneustos;
3. Therefore divine inspiration preserved the sacred amanuenses from every error.

(Exam. Theol. Acr. etc., Prol. III, qn. 18)

This is very good logic, but as poor theology as Calvin's conclusion that since some are predestined to eternal life, others must be predestined to damnation. And both are bad theology. Baier, whose Compendium, had a great deal of influence on our early decades as a Synod, argued that a Scriptures with discrepancies in it would be unworthy of the dignity of God. That's exactly what the Greeks used to say about the incarnation: it is unworthy of God to become man. But God did become incarnate; He did become one of us and shared our life and existence. Luther is most eloquent in his treatment of the Christmas story to show how completely the Christ became one of us even as a little child. So likewise we may say that surely God would not give us a Bible that shares in limitations of the authors' lives and times. We might wish the Scriptures to contain documents from which the glory of the Lord would shine forth. The fact is that God did not choose to do it that way.

In His grace God decided to condescend to our level, all the way. This is what John Chrysostom, and others after him, called sun-katabasis, a stooping down to our level. For let us make no mistake about it: the Scriptures are both fully divine and fully human. It is God's Word and man's word. One might say that it is God's Word just because it is the word of men who were prophets, apostles, evangelists, and wise men.

We must beware of docetism in the doctrine of Scripture just as we must avoid it when we discuss the person of Christ. Psalm 51 is no make-believe; it is a flesh-and-blood confession of sins from David's lips, just as our Lord's agonizing prayer in Gethsemane is no sacred pantomime, but a real human suffering. The Bible speaks the truth, but in human language. It narrates history, but with the literary means of that time, and not of ours.

And its authors remain within the world-view of their time, with all of the limitations that this involves. Included in these limitations are statements of history, where we occasionally find what seems to be discrepancies. For instance, there is no way of reconciling the two varying accounts of the number of exiles returning from Babylon that we have in Nehemiah, and Ezra. There is no way of working out a consistent genealogy when you compare Matthew's series of ancestors of our Lord with what the Old Testament gives us. There is no way of being absolutely sure as to just what the superscription on the Cross was; each evangelist has a different reading. Each of the three Synoptics gives us a different wording for what the Father said at Jesus' baptism.

But let us take as our example for study a passage of which Luther uses the expression "error gravis". The passage we will consider is Acts 7, 2-4, the beginning of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin.

Before we look at this we must keep in mind that Jesus had promised His followers, "When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Mt. 10, 19,20) I'm quoting this ahead of time so that the discrepancies in what Stephen says can not blithely be dismissed by saying, "But Luke is inerrant when he records exactly what Stephen said." This is what a few Roman Catholic exegetes have actually said, operating from an a priori view of inspiration that is not derived from what we actually find to be the case in Scripture.

Stephen was the first of the martyrs. The first one to be dragged before a council intent on destroying him. If ever the promise of the Spirit's presence was fulfilled it was in the instance of Stephen. Now see what he says under the influence of this Spirit:

"Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him. 'Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.' Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land..."

Now compare this with the end of Genesis 11 and the beginning of Genesis 12. The Genesis account says nothing of a call that came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. It is very specific in saying that Abram was called at Haran, after Terah and his whole family had moved there from Ur. And in case you say, "Well, there may have been a second call", I'll introduce you to the real conundrum. Stephen says that Abraham left Haran after his father died. Observe however, the information we have in Genesis. In Gen. 11, 26 we read, "When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." In verse 4 of the next chapter it says that Abram "was 75 years old when he departed from Haran." But just a few verses before that we have the statement that Terah lived to be two hundred and five years old. Stephen says Abraham left Haran after his father died. According to the Genesis account Abram left when his father was 145 years of age. A little later Stephen says that 75 persons came down into Egypt with Pharaoh; our Hebrew Bible has the figure 70, In verse 16, just to complicate matters. Stephen has Jacob and all the patriarchs buried at Sychem. According to the Old Testament only Joseph was buried there; and Jacob was buried at Hebron. Furthermore, according to our old Testament, bought a burial site in the field of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite. Stephen says he bought a burial place at Sychem from the Sons of Emmor.

Even Dr. Engelder is stumped by all this. He says so in The Scripture Cannot be Broken. But he adds that in the light of glory we'll understand all this. In the meantime we are to bow before the authority of Scripture, he suggests. That is very sound advice, and not only when there are discrepancies!

These discrepancies cannot be explained away on the theory of textual corruption. As a matter of fact from all the complicated textual studies that have been made of Acts 7, one solid conclusion can be drawn: it is just these difficult statements that are closest to the original and have the best textual support. The explanation can be found in the fact that Stephen, as we are expressly told, grew up as a Hellenist, with a Greek-Jewish background. And in the Greek tradition, as we know from Philo and Josephus, God's call came to Abram in Ur; and he left Haran after Terah had died. Moreover, the LXX has the figure 75 for the number of people that come to Egypt with Jacob. In other words, Stephen was speaking, under the influence of the Spirit, mind you, on the basis of the information he had on these historical points. When all is said and done, Luther says, "I'll take my stand with Moses here; he knew more about the subject."

This is a pastoral matter for you and me. You have sent girls and boys to college, secular institutions. Before long you noticed that they had become almost agnostic. Now, if you have ever taken the time to analyze the reason for this, you will have found that in many cases the faith of such young people was upset when some teacher called their attention to such discrepancies. He may have asked a simple question, like, "From what mountain did Jesus ascend into heaven?" Then, if the student said, "The Mount of Olives", the teacher might read the end of Matthew, which unmistakably suggests that he ascended from a mountain in Galilee.

What I'm trying to say is this: If you have built the faith of your confirmands on a theory of inspiration which does not take into full account what the Scriptures actually say, you have dealt unfairly with that child. This is what Dr. Sasse was referring to with the sentence I read near the beginning of this paper, "How many souls has the Church not harmed with such doctrines in a way that can never be made good again!"

For this reason it ought to be obvious that the word "inerrant" can be and usually is a very misleading term to use of the Scriptures. It is dangerous because it is a word that makes sense only in the light of a false view of inspiration — one that got into the Church from ancient paganism and has been perpetuated by the Reformed-Fundamentalist tradition.

Now, in a way, I suppose, it would be much more interesting to have a book unmarred by human limitations, a book so unique in its formal aspect that it was obviously different from every other book. But it just doesn't happen to be that way. It is the material in the Scriptures that make them unique. That's what makes the Bible inspired: it says what can only be said "in the Spirit." It testifies to the Christ. Every last syllable of it does. That is verbal inspiration; and that is what makes it the Word of God. Being the Word of God, the Bible does not need any extra props to support it by way of theories of inspiration and inerrancy. It is quite able to take care of itself, if we will just let it speak.

I want to add here two formulations. One is Lutheran; the other is Reformed. One follows from the formal, the other from the material principle. It has been said, "The Scriptures are the Word of God, and as such they are inspired," That is Lutheran. The other formulation has it, "The Bible is inspired; therefore it is the Word of God." That is Reformed Fundamentalism. Between these two statements is a great gulf fixed. Unhappily the Brief Statement is usually interpreted in the light of the second and formal principle. That is why the whole question of the Scriptures, particularly its inerrancy, needs a great deal of airing before we commit ourselves to a final formulation.

In Lutheran theology, faith comes first. That is what distinguishes our doctrine of inspiration from that of the Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Seventh Day Adventists—all of whom accept the formal principle of inspiration. They believe in the Bible as an inerrant book—and are lost! Their faith is in a book and not in Him to whom all the prophets and apostles bear witness, our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be glory throughout the Church, both now and forevermore!